

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Zebulon Pike and Fur Trader
James Aird: The Explorer and
the 'Scottish Gentleman'

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Summer, 2005

Volume 40, Number 2

Rendezvous at the Riverbend

Pike's Seven Days in the Land of Little Crow—
The Wilderness that Later Became St. Paul

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A view of Pike Island with Fort Snelling in the distance as painted by Seth Eastman. The fort, of course, did not exist at the time of Pike's 1805 expedition, but Pike had recommended its site as the location for a military fort. Minnesota Historical Society collections.

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THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN JULY 2003:

The Ramsey County Historical Society shall discover, collect, preserve and interpret the history of the county for the general public, recreate the historical context in which we live and work, and make available the historical resources of the county. The Society's major responsibility is its stewardship over this history.

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Alexandra (Sandy) Klas

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A Message from the Editorial Board

September 23, 2005, marks the 200th anniversary of the signing of what is known as Pike's Treaty—an agreement between a number of Mdewatanton leaders and Lieutenant Zebulon M. Pike in which the Native Americans granted an area that includes today's historic Fort Snelling to the United States in return for what eventually was about \$2,000. Historian Gary Brueggemann leads off this issue with a carefully drawn account of Pike's visit to Minnesota in 1805 and the consequences of this treaty.

Complementing Brueggemann's article is a short piece by Duke Addicks, who is a historical re-enactor. Addicks tells readers how he, as a modern-day storyteller, portrays the nineteenth-century Scottish fur trader James Aird, who met Pike just days before the Pike party arrived in Minnesota.

Readers may remember that in our Winter 2005 issue, we carried an essay reconstructing the history of the DeLoop Parking Ramp using building permits in the RCHS's St. Paul Building Permits Collection. In this issue, Steve Trimble gives us a photo essay in which he uses photographs to demonstrate the many ways in which parking garages helped shape the urban landscape of St. Paul.

This issue concludes with a "Growing Up" piece in which Alexandra (Sandy) Klas fondly remembers her aunt, Frances Boardman, the long-time journalist for the *St. Paul Dispatch*. Frances Boardman was a colorful and compelling St. Paul writer whose death in 1953 was mourned by many friends as well as others who had simply enjoyed reading her many theater, music, and other reviews in the newspaper over the years.

John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board

Growing Up in St. Paul

I Remember My Aunt: Frances Boardman— Music Critic, Who Covered an Archbishop's Funeral

Alexandra (Sandy) Klas

Editor's Note: Memories of the late Frances Boardman, longtime reporter and music critic for the St. Paul newspapers, were stirred by the publication of Steve Trimble's history, "The Legacy of the St. Paul Opera Association," in the Winter 2005 issue of Ramsey County History. Here her niece shares some recollections of her famous aunt.

My first name is Frances. I was named after my aunt whose name was Frances Corning Boardman and she was named after a close friend of her mother's, Frances Corning, who was happy that I had her name and even happier that I didn't get her middle name because I don't think she liked it. My parents named me Alexandra so there wouldn't be two Frances Boardmans.

The Boardmans were a colorful family. Aunt Frances, born in 1879, was the fourth child of my grandfather, Henry Augustus Boardman, Jr., and Ellen Rice Boardman, a niece of pioneer Henry Rice who gave Rice Park to the City of St. Paul. As a young man, Henry III, Aunt Frances's brother, ran away from his strict father, and Aunt Frances spent many, many years trying to find him. She told me that working for a newspaper helped her in her search. Eventually she found Henry's second wife, Alice, his widow, who was living in Dallas, Texas, with their son, Henry Augustus Boardman IV and a granddaughter, Paula Elaine Boardman, who, born in 1948, ended four generations of "Henry Augustus Boardmans." In 1963 my husband Bob and I went to Dallas to meet them. My cousin Henry's wife, Paula's mother, with her American Indian heritage, was a beautiful woman. Sadly, when they divorced, Paula remained with her mother and we lost track of her.

There were other children in the Boardman family: an older sister, Jessie Rice Boardman born in 1876; Mary, who was born in 1878 but died when she was

thirteen; and two younger brothers, John Lamboll Boardman, born in 1886; and Edmund Rice Boardman, born in 1887 but died as an infant. Aunt Frances told me that when she was seven years old, John drowned in White Bear Lake. She couldn't understand why everyone was crying. He looked so nice as he lay in his little coffin and she thought they could just keep him there and look at him any time they wished.

My grandfather married again after his wife died in 1890 at the age of forty. My grandmother, Cornelia Marshall Coxe, was the widow of a widower. She had a step son and a son by her first husband, and another son by her second husband, who was my father, Lawrence Boardman. Once at a party Aunt Frances was asked if she was related to an Alexander Coxe. She thought for a moment, then said, "Alexander Coxe is my half brother's half brother's half brother." And she was right.

My grandparents evidently were not prepared to parent again. My dad said his father had insisted that he be called "Father," not "Dad," and that he had begun to tolerate him only after he was no longer a baby or a little boy. My grandmother apparently was interested only in the social scene and not at all in being a mother.

Thus it was that my Aunt Frances, sixteen years older than her half brother, became, for the first time, a surrogate mother. She had attended Central High School in St. Paul and began nurses' training in Philadelphia. She said she really enjoyed that, but had trouble sleeping. I suspect she was homesick and missed

her little half-brother, but she remained there for six months, long enough to get her uniform. Then she "went to pieces and spent two months in bed." "I had to come home," she told me. "Dr. Gillette, of course, said 'I told you so,' and he was right. I thought my life was over."

Not sure what she wanted to do, having no formal education except for a high school diploma and a short stint in nurses' training, she got a lucky break. Charles Graskey, who was her mother's brother's friend, had bought the *St. Paul Dispatch*, (and also 235 Summit Avenue where one day Aunt Frances would live) and he offered her a job. She became a pioneering woman in the newspaper world, and one day she would become "the dean of American Critics."

"I'd never touched a typewriter," she



Frances Boardman. Unless otherwise noted, all photos with this article are from the author.

recalled later. "I didn't know how you went about getting news or doing anything about a newspaper. It was unknown, completely unknown to me. And so I started in. At first I was just given little fill-in jobs. They said, 'there's your typewriter; we don't take any copy in long-hand.' That was in 1909, I think."

She told me there was a woman who had been the paper's music critic—they didn't take those departments very seriously then, she said. She had done book reviewing, she had a garden page, and also was assigned any odd jobs that came along. "She found out I was terribly interested in music and she used to let me go to the lesser events, to see what I could do about reporting them. Finally she gave up the department and I remember her saying that she hadn't minded doing it except that she didn't like music. So I did it."

Death Comes to the Archbishop

Next Aunt Frances was told to substitute for the newspaper's drama critic while he was on vacation, but he decided not to return to the paper and she inherited the post.

"I don't remember the first plays I reviewed," she told me, "but they were all summer stock plays. At that time we sometimes had two summer stock companies playing here at once each summer, often at the old Schubert Theatre. It was very exciting. This was in 1912, I think."

She was to learn more about the excitement of breaking news. In September 1918, Archbishop John Ireland lay dying in his home on Portland Avenue. Later, in notes she wrote for an interview, she described how she covered the archbishop's death and funeral:

"One day in September, the acting city editor was almost beside himself. He said a doctor had just told him that the archbishop couldn't possibly live more than two or three more weeks. He asked if I knew him and I said, 'Well, I've seen him lots of times, but I don't know him.' He said, 'I looked in the [newspaper] library and the obituary material isn't nearly up-to-date and we simply must remedy that. Will you take it over? Just drop everything else.' I think I'd mentioned that my grandfather had been a good friend of [the arch-



Frances Boardman at the age of ten.



Lawrence Boardman, Frances Boardman's brother.

bishop]. The two facts that my grandfather had known him and that I was on my feet were enough to qualify me. That was all the recommendation you needed in those days. If you could walk under your own steam, you were a good reporter.

"He told me to get to work on that obit-

uary material and talk to anybody who would be able to help—any of his contemporaries who may be around—and at the same time, stay close to the telephone because there was a death watch going in the garage across the street from the archbishop's house. The garage was full of newspapermen from all over the Northwest. When the news comes, he said, 'drop everything and write the stories.'

Sixteen-hour days

"For about two weeks I worked sixteen-hour days. He finally died [on September 25] and I thought I was going to beat him to the cemetery. Then I was told to cover the funeral. When you are brought up in a completely different church, you know that you have to learn a new language. I think I realized then that I had been lucky to have a father who was very fastidious about speech and about fine distinctions in language. He'd had a good background in Latin and Greek.

"Fortunately, a week had to elapse between the archbishop's death and his funeral so that celebrities from all over the country had time to arrive for the services. My job was to work with the Chancellor's office to develop a list. You had to be very careful about names, titles, and order of precedence.

"Every day I got into a huddle with the archbishop's secretary and the rector of the Cathedral, the undertaker, the vicar general of the diocese, and the master of ceremonies. I was sure they were going to shoot me because I asked so many questions. It was terribly interesting if you're not too tired to enjoy it."

A Touch of the Medieval

Aunt Frances's behind-the-scenes description of those colorful, almost medieval, Catholic ceremonies honoring a prince of the church continued:

"Finally the day came when the archbishop's body was taken from his home to the Cathedral. By that time I was practically a member of the family. I arrived at the house a day earlier. They all were watching at the front window—the old housekeeper who had been there thirty years, the secretary, the archbishop's sister [probably Ellen Ireland (Mother Seraphine)] and a friend of hers, both of them



Archbishop John Ireland. Photo from the archives of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

nuns, and several other people. It was the last day of September, a perfect autumn day, one of those lovely, not-quite-hazy but pearly days we often have. The sky was pale blue and there was no wind. I could see the Capitol and the Cathedral clearly.

“The approach to the house was solidly lined with cadets from Cretin and St. Thomas—down the stairways, up the curve of the avenue, up to the house. The doors opened. First in the procession were the acolytes—thirty or forty, I think—with their red cassocks and white surplices and candles. They formed outside the house. Then came 200 seminarians, two by two and singing the plain chant. There were 100 men between the first and last lines and the unanimity of pitch was amazing. It was just lacerating.

“I was so far gone with fatigue that I think I broke down completely at that point. An old nun, thinking I was grief-stricken, kissed me and said ‘I know, dear, it’s hard to lose him, but we mustn’t wish him back.’ I felt like saying, ‘I’m the last person in this world who would wish him

back.’ After that, there were a thousand of the diocesan clergy, marching in order of seniority, the younger men first.

A Blinding Light

“And then, all of a sudden, it was just as though there was a sort of blinding light as the three main entrances of the Cathedral were filled by sixty or seventy bishops and archbishops in their rose-purple robes and a few abbots among them. It was something you could never duplicate because no theater could arrange a setting like this. It was made to order and where we were it was just indescribably wonderful and it all came off so beautifully, so quietly.

“The next day was the funeral and the burial at Calvary Cemetery. I was there, just managing to totter to my feet. At the gravesite, I saw them lowering the casket. Then I saw a Yellow Cab. I hailed it and went home. I went to bed with my shoes on. The *Dispatch* was an afternoon paper so I had to be up bright and early the next morning to write like mad. But it was something to have lived through, something very significant, in my life, at least.



The funeral of Archbishop John Ireland at the Cathedral of St. Paul on October 1, 1918. This photograph is from the archives of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

"After that, my managing editor said, 'Be on the alert for his successor and be ready to go wherever he is.' On a newspaper, you are type-cast very much as you are in a movie. Similarly, if you do one Catholic story you're tagged. I was assigned Catholic Church stories for the next twenty-five years."

That was the beginning of what my Presbyterian Aunt Frances would become—an authority on the liturgical music in the Roman Catholic Church and a personal friend of clergy all over the world.

* * *

In 1936, when I was five years old and my sister Evelyn (now Evelyn Boardman Morse) was three, our mother Margaret died during a scarlet fever epidemic. She was only thirty-five years old. She was a native of San Francisco and had met my father when he lived there. Both of them were reporters for rival newspapers. My dad worked for the Scripps-Howard newspapers. Later he transferred to New York City where they were married, then to Washington D.C., and eventually back home to St. Paul. Aunt Frances never married (she told me once she was "too busy") and she stepped again into her role as surrogate mother until my father remarried.

Every weekend in the summer he would take us to my aunt's home for the day. By then she had moved to 235 Summit Avenue. It was a three-floor apartment building next to the Cathedral parking lot. Her cousin, Rachel Sanborn, a social worker and also single, lived on the second floor. I never knew who lived on the third floor, but I used to climb all those stairs so I could slide down the banister. Aunt Frances's apartment included a front room with tall windows that faced Summit Avenue; two Victorian sofas flanked the fireplace; there was an upright piano, a marvelous "petticoat-style" buffet next to the front door (a great place to hide), a rather worn Oriental rug, and everywhere, it seemed, BOOKS and BOOKS, plus periodicals from numerous countries (I remember *Punch and Judy*), lots of reading lamps, places to put things on, paintings and English prints on the walls, plants on the window sills, stacks of records. Every

Saturday the record companies would send her a new record to review.

Behind the front room was sort of an "all purpose room." It had an enormous four poster bed in which she and all her siblings had been born; a large dresser full of lovely gloves, handkerchiefs, broaches and rings—things she wore when she went out to review an event. There also was a work table with her typewriter, more books, more magazines, and piles of copy paper and big green pencils that were staples for newspaper reporters. She also had a little bed in there covered with more of the above. Next to her kitchen door was a large breakfront housing her tablecloths, bed sheets, dishes, and silverware. There was another worn Oriental rug, lamps, pictures and, again, places to put things on.



Anna and Korant Andahazy during the 1961-1962 season of the Andahazys' Ballet Borealis Company. Frances Boardman helped the Andahazys establish their ballet school in St. Paul after they, among other talented refugees, fled Europe at the time of World War II. Photo by Constantine of Hollywood from Marius J. Andahazy.

Off to one side and overlooking the Cathedral parking lot was a screen porch where during the summer she drank her morning coffee. The porch was concealed from the Cathedral by thick grape vines. She used to joke that she could sit out there naked and never be seen by the

unending parade of clergy walking back and forth from the Cathedral to the James J. Hill house, including Archbishop Murray, a close friend of hers.

Her small kitchen had plenty of wonderful food, most of it gifts from Ramaleys and Eisenmengers, but some from all corners of the world. In that small space, my sister Evelyn and I were in heaven. Since there were no children for us to play with, Aunt Frances had wonderful toys for us and, of course, always books. She taught us little French nursery songs on her piano. Our favorite time was sitting on either side of her and asking her to make up a story about when she was a little girl and was naughty. We liked the one about pouring a bucket of water over someone's head.

She fed us on a card table with a linen cloth and, always, linen napkins, her mother's sterling silver, and Canton china. Our favorite menu was buttered cooked cabbage, scrambled eggs, and cocoa made with canned milk, cocoa, sugar and "a pinch of salt." She gave us a fabulous playground—the St. Paul Cathedral. Where else are there corners, columns, confessionals, and steps for kids to run and hide in? In those days there were many young seminarians, all of them away from home and missing their own little sisters; they loved us and we loved them. And of course, the parking lot was a great place to play ball.

We could watch the St. Paul Winter Carnival parades from her front windows. I thought it would be great fun to climb out of our Cousin Rachel's windows on the second floor and sit on the slippery, snowy roof for a better look. Needless to say, that didn't happen. I remember Aunt Frances taking my sister and me to the home of Matilda Heck and her sister to see their Christmas tree covered with lights and ornaments with lots of pretty things under it. Matilda taught music in the St. Paul Public School system and she would visit my school. I was so proud that I was the only one in my class who had seen her tree.

Many times Cousin Rachel joined us. She was a small woman, always had her knitting with her, was very energetic, and walked everywhere. Neither she nor Aunt Frances ever drove a car. My aunt relied on taxis and all the drivers knew her. When I



Frances, right, with her sister, Jessie Boardman Davidson.

was old enough I would accompany her to afternoon concerts. I remember seeing the French opera singer, Lily Pons. She wore a long, green velvet Princess-style gown with mink cuffs on the long sleeves and mink on the hem. I thought she was the most beautiful "princess" I'd ever seen. As she aged and critics wrote that her voice was fading, I felt very sad.

The first opera I saw was *Aida*. I was greatly distressed that the lovers in the tomb kept on singing, rather than trying to get out. My father was furious with Aunt Frances for taking me to "that godawful thing" and told her to come over every night when I had nightmares.

Before any of these concerts or performances ended, we would take a cab downtown to the *Dispatch* building where she wrote her review. I would sit there quietly and listen to the clacking of her typewriter. It was kind of fun, especially when I was old enough to attend evening events. I would watch the night-side staff put out the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, the morning paper. One evening when we were walking into Northrup Auditorium for an evening concert, my aunt told me I was old enough to stay until the end and go home alone in the taxi she had ordered. I still remember how nervous I was.

On my sixteenth birthday, she took me

to the Lowry Hotel for dinner. We had a ringside table and Ted Weems and his dance orchestra were performing. Ted sang "Happy Birthday" to me. I was so surprised. Up until then I'd heard only classical music with my aunt, but she said, "Honey, all music is important."

After she retired, her doctor advised her not to be alone at night anymore, so I moved in and slept in that little bed in her apartment. At the time I lived with her, I saw countless musicians, poets, authors, and dancers in her living room. She helped many immigrants who were fleeing Europe and settling in St. Paul during and after World War II. All were talented artists. Among them were the Andahazys, whom she helped start their ballet school.

One notable she interviewed was the great French actress, Sarah Bernhardt, who refused to speak English when in the United States. Aunt Frances had studied many foreign languages and tutored many young opera singers, so my aunt was sent to New York to meet her—an exciting assignment for a reporter from St. Paul, Minnesota. After that, Bernhardt always asked to be interviewed by the "lovely lady who speaks French and has beautiful hands." Around that time, also, the great contralto, Marian Anderson, was refused permission to sing in Constitution Hall in Washington. Aunt Frances wrote a scathing column and dropped her membership in the Daughters of the American Revolution.

When this remarkable Protestant woman passed away in 1953, her funeral services were conducted by Monsignor James H. Moynihan in the O'Halloran and Murphy Funeral Chapel on West Sixth Street in downtown St. Paul. Her longtime colleague and friend, James Gray, at that time a professor of English at the University of Minnesota, wrote of her that she seemed to him "the very embodiment of the idea of a gentlewoman, superb in dignity, never shaken out of poise, yet capable of a vivid passion for values, brightened by a gamin love of the grotesque, inspired by a loyalty to people and principles the likes of which I have never known. She was a creature of myriad insights and the little candle of her wit lightened up everyone."



One of Seth Eastman's paintings which he labeled "Permanent Residence of the Sioux" and probably is the village of Ka-so-ja (Kaposia) as it looked in 1846 when Eastman was an officer at Fort Snelling. Minnesota Historical Society collections.

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